DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 245 283 CS 504 614

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TITLE Individual Events as a Laboratory for Argument: Analogues for Limited Preparation Events.
PUB DATE 14 Apr 84
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Chicago, IL, April 12-14, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Competition; *Debate; Higher Education; High Schools; *Persuasive Discourse; *Speech Skills; Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Individual Events (Forensics)

ABSTRACT

To better serve as a laboratory for argument, individual events competition should represent analogues of "real world" argumentation/communication situations. The individual events laboratory must fulfill a pedagogical function, and should also "create" knowledge about argumentation strategies, specific fields of argument, and argumentation theory. As currently practiced, individual events do not provide an effective laboratory for argument, because they lack a theoretical base and do not bear much resemblance to practical discourse situations outside the contest environment. They also do not incorporate intense interaction, nor do they provide a defined audience. Adapting the competitive individual events scene to a laboratory that attempts to model either everyday discourse situations or specialized discourse contexts would do a great deal to enhance the value of forensic competition. Individual events contexts that are analogous to everyday discourse situations are press conference speaking, news events reporting, situational interviewing, negotiation, and legal disputation. (HTH)

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ED245283

Individual Events as a Laboratory For Argument: Analogues for Limited Preparation Events

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Presented at the C.S.S.A. Convention, April 14, 1984

In a paper presented at the 1983 AFA/SCA Summer Argumentation Conference, I argued that little serious scholarship is extant documenting either the value of individual events competition or the relationship between such competition and the speaking experiences students face when they enter the "real world."[1] Competitive individual events, as currently practiced, is an activity which occurs absent a "real world" analogue. Following the paper presentation, a discussion ensued in which several individuals expressed the opinion that the analogue concept seemed worthy of further inquiry.

This paper examines the potential value of competitive individual events as a laboratory for argument. Specifically, I contend that the current structure and practice of individual events provides students a highly abstract, sterile, and non-interactive environment in which to test argumentation strategies--an environment that fails to provide meaningful insight into how argument is used or may be better used in such practical discourse contexts as politics, interpersonal settings, or teaching. To better serve as a laboratory for argument, individual events should represent analogues of "real world" argumentation/communication situations. The argument is advanced

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by examining four key questions: (1) What is a "laboratory for argument?" (2) Does the current practice of individual events provide an argumentation laboratory? (3) Can an analogue approach to individual events provide a more effective laboratory for argument? (4) What analogues are available which emphasize limited preparation for communication/argumentation settings?

Laboratory for Argument

During and after the Sedalia Conference the notion of forensics as a laboratory took on considerable popularity. In a definitional statement Sedalia conferrees note that forensic activities "are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences."[2] The term "laboratory" is variously defined. Bartanen, for example, tells us that a laboratory is "a place for experiment, where theories and ideas are critically tested and ultimately validated, modified or discarded."[3] Thomas draws upon Sedalia and interprets the laboratory as potentially fulfilling several goals: "1. The laboratory may be a production workshop where something is made or analyzed as a public service. 2. The laboratory may be a teaching and learning environment. 3. The laboratory can be the setting for controlled scientific research.[4]

Applying these definitions to competitive forensics is certainly laudable. However, there is good reason to believe

that the laboratory notion is usually seen as only incidental to competitive forensics. Competitors and judges alike are usually more interested in the activity of forensics than the object of that activity. Zarefsky makes the point clear:

> The distinction between 'forensics' and 'forensic activities' is not trivial. Rather, the first stands to the second as genus to species. But people in forensics, by and large, identify themselves with the species rather than the genus. They define their professional roles by reference to activity programs rather than to the object of their study.[5]

Invoking the laboratory metaphor requires us to first address the nature and purpose of that laboratory. My fundamental belief is that individual events enjoy far greater pedagogical worth if they are viewed as argumentative endeavors rather than delivery or public speaking activities. The inclusion of papers on individual events at the second Alta Argumentation Conference suggests that a growing number of argumentation scholars perceive a relationship between competitive forensics and argumentation. Those papers provide many well-reasoned arguments demonstrating that individual events do indeed employ an argumentation perspective. Hanson, for example, borrowing from Wallace and Perelman, notes that "speaker-act" is an appropriate argumentation paradigm for individual events:

> Individual events seem most appropriately tied to the rhetorical dimension of argumentation. There is much room for the investigation of the relationship between argumentation and individual events. Claim-making is indeed an intricate part of the activity in individual speaking events. In substance, matter, and form, individual speaking events exhibit many definitive links to the field of argumentation.[6]

The claim that individual events is--or should be--fundamentally concerned with argumentation is no longer a controversial one.

The individual events laboratory must have at its apex the pedagogical function. As Ziegelmueller summarizes in the proceedings of the Sedalia conference, the "raison'd'etre" of forensics is pedagogy.[7] Thus, a critical function of the individual events laboratory is pedagogical--the laboratory must teach students about argumentation. The laboratory should acquaint students with a variety of perspectives on argument, provide a forum for testing those perspectives, and provide knowledge transferable to the genus when the participants are removed from the laboratory.

In addition to this pedagogical function, the individual events laboratory should also "create" knowledge. The laboratory of the physical sciences is an appropriate analogy. Here students perform experiments to learn about various physical science principles. After gaining rudimentary skills, students

continue to experiment in an effort to discover new principles--principles which may later be transferred to the real world. The forensics laboratory may create knowledge in several areas: knowledge about argumentation strategies, knowledge about specific fields of argument, and knowledge about argumentation theory. Several writers have argued that such knowledge creation can be achieved by academic debate. Goodnight, for example, claims:

> Whether in the area of argument fields, value disputation, social analysis, or political assessment, development of debate theory has much to offer students of argumentation. Beyond that knowledge which can be provided by philosophical speculation or in the field of research among naive social actors, debate offers a challenge to those who construct theories of arguments to test those theories through an impartial and intense encounter of advocates. As practices of argument in debate continue to evolve, there is much worth that can be shared with those who would study argumentation.[8]

There appears to be no inherent reason why the individual events laboratory cannot offer this intense interaction in the testing of theory.

Current Practice of Individual Events

Do individual events, as currently practiced, provide an effective laboratory for argument? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Two indictments establish this claim. First, the current practice of individual events lacks a theoretical base. Although over the years forensic educators have liberally borrowed from persuasion research, psychology, and other fields, they have been relatively unconcerned with a "theory of argument." This point is raised throughout the literature on forensics. Bartanen, for example, argues:

> Even more significant to the confusion about the role of individual events in argumentation is the absence of theoretical discussion about individual events and argument. Recent years have found numerous studies of the relationship between debate and decision making, as well as the implementation of many decision making concepts into the actual practice of academic debate. No similar relationship exists between individual events and decision making.[9]

Larson and O'Rourke issue a similar claim:

> Even though there has been an increase in the number and frequency of individual events offerings at forensic tournaments the literature on the use of argumentation in individual events is almost nil. Coaches and forensic

experts have not taken the time to think out the argumentation dimensions related to individual events like they have in the field of debate.[10]

The notion that our pedagogy must be grounded in theory, or as Faules, Rieke, and Rhodes state, "pedagogy is generated by theory," is not a controversial one.[11] When practice exists independent of theory--or, only loosely connected to that theory--the laboratory cannot be judged adequate.

In addition to the missing theoretical grounding, the current practice of individual events also demonstrates its inadequacy as a laboratory for argument. The overall point is supported by Bartanen:

> . . . equally as important are some of the actual practices of individual events which detract from the ability of individual events to successfully teach argumentation. Henry McGucken, for example, criticizes the performance and analytical weaknesses of the individual events: "Extemp and impromptu frequently seem to stress the glib over the thoughtful, interp to stress the actor's finesse over the literary insight, and oratory may be the sadest event of all, for that event possesses the greatest potential for exercising reasoned eloquence. Instead, tournament oratory has given rise to a specialized form of discourse, a 'third sophistic' plumbing the affective depths of style and delivery, poor rhetoric and worse poetry, a

kind of speech presently unheard and unheard of anywhere except in oratory contests.[12]

Although many factors contribute to poor practice of argumentation in individual events, three factors stand out. First, with a few exceptions, most individual events do not bear much resemblence to the practical discourse situations students will face when they leave the contest environment. In their study of argument forms in individual events, Larson and O'Rourke conclude:

> There needs to be a stronger connection between forensic contest speeches and the actual public speaking situations students are likely to experience in real-life. In real-life a speaker seldom draws a national topic, outlines a speech, and then delivers the speech 30 minutes later. It is also highly unlikely that a speaker will memorize a persuasive speech on a serious social problem and propose a means of correcting the evil--all within a ten minute time limit.[13]

Without this "real-life" link the individual events laboratory is too artificial.

A second factor contributing to the poor practice of individual events is the failure of the tournament model to incorporate intense interaction. The typical individual events

tournament involves events for which students enter a room in which sits a single judge. The student performs their event and then leaves. Very rarely do students have the opportunity to challenge the ideas presented by other speakers. Aside from a single sheet of paper or a notecard the judge has little opportunity to interact with the student. The absence of interaction and the lack of intense challenging of ideas further divorces individual events from practical discourse.

The third factor contributing to poor individual events practice is both situational and theoretical. This factor involves the nature of the audience which the individual events student addresses. The nature of the audience in academic debate has undergone significant change--ranging from the general lay audience to the more specialized hypothesis tester and public policy maker. The nature of the audience in individual events is less clear. In some ways the individual events audience resembles the "universal audience" identified by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.[14] The vagueness of this concept, especially as applied to ten different individual speaking events, makes it difficult for judge and student alike to understand how argumentation should best occur. If we buy into the conclusions generated by argument fields research, that different fields involve different argument standards, then the universal audience concept is inadequate and fails to contribute to sound pedagogical experience.

The Analogue Approach

The analogue approach to individual events is presented as a means to improve the laboratory experience available to students as well as to provide a more realistic environment in which theory can be tested and social action can be critiqued. In its essence, the analogue approach seeks to model specific individual events based upon real world situations.

Adapting the competitive individual events scene to a laboratory which attempts to model either everyday discourse situations or specialized discourse contexts would do a great deal to enhance the value of forensic competition. First, the laboratory analogue would enhance the pedagogical worth of forensic participation. It would do so by giving students a more realistic speaking situation. By more closely resembling natural discourse situations competitive forensics would allow students to utilize the results of scholarly research on persuasion and communication in their efforts to prepare for forensic competition. By mirroring the audience and interaction demands of natural discourse, students will learn a great deal more about the argumentation process. In addition, viewing forensics as a laboratory for argument would provide researchers with another forum in which to test theory.

Analogues for Limited Preparation Events

The starting point for analogues should not be the existing event descriptions for the various individual speaking events. Instead, we should begin by examining naturally occuring discourse situations to determine which are most useful to our students. There are numerous everyday conversation situations and specialized communication contexts in which message senders have limited time in which to prepare their messages. The teacher who is called upon to answer questions in class engages in limited preparation speaking. We are frequently stoped by strangers and asked for directions, thus facing an impromptu speaking situation. In employment interviews we must provide impromptu answers to questions about our personal and career goals. The number of times during the day in which a person must communicate at the impromptu or extemporaneous level is indeed large. These situations form the basis for the analogues with which this paper is concerned.

Analogue One: Press Conference Speaking

Public policy decision-makers at all different levels, including political office holders and members of the bureaucracy, are frequently called upon to answer questions at press conferences and to provide briefings. The peculiar demands of the press conference require the speaker to provide short, factual answers to a myriad of questions on which they supposedly have expertise. Reporters play various roles at the press

conference, ranging from information retrievers to grand inquisitors. The speaker regards the reporters as an immediate audience that filters the information to the larger public audience.

In many ways, the communication skills and knowledge required of the press conference speaker resemble those required of the student participating in extemporaneous speaking. However, the press conference analogue would provide greater realism by adding audience-speaker interaction as well as a specific audience and particular subject matter. In the forensics laboratory, the press conference event could involve providing students with a general topic area on which to prepare. For example, a tournament invitation could announce the general topic area of United States foreign policy as it relates to the third world. Students would prepare for the event by doing general reading of popular newsmagzines and specific reading of field-specific publications such as Foreign Affairs, the Congressional Record, and World Press Review. At the tournament, speakers would conduct mini-press conferences at which judges and other contestants asked the questions.

Analogue Two: News Event Reporting

In everday discourse we are frequently called upon to describe an event that has occured. For example, we may witness an automobile accident and later have to describe that occurence to a police officer. Such situations force message senders to develop observational and reporting skills--skills especially

important to television news reporting.

The forensics laboratory could incorporate an event emphasizing observational and reporting skills. Through the use of videotape, students and judges could view a five minute tape depicting a newsworthy subject (for example, a natural disaster, crime, political speech, or election returns). Students could be given a half hour in which to prepare a three minute newsstory in which they report on the incident. The event of news reporting would provide students with a real world analogue having a specific audience and a specific set of skills that are important not only to news reporting but to everyday discourse situations in which we are required to recount an event.

Analogue Three: Situational Interviewing

Most communication situations we encounter in everyday discourse involve considerable interaction between communicators. Through the use of questions we retrieve a great deal of information about the person with whom we are interacting. The interview is a situation which we encounter daily. Many professions require extensive knowledge of interviewing techniques. For instance, the medical interview is critical to a doctor or nurse attempting to diagnose a patient. Similarly, the lawyer spends a great deal of time interviewing clients, jurors, and witnesses. In everyday discourse and in professional interviewing, both the questioner and the interviewee engage in argument. That is, both are issuing claims which they want the other to believe.

An interviewing event could be incorporated in the forensics laboratory in which students were judged both on their questioning and answering skills. Students could be given interview situation fact sheets upon which they were to base their questions and answers. Students could then have time to devise their interviewing strategy and then participate both as an interviewee and an interviewer.

Analogue Four: Negotiation

Thus far, the proposed analogues have concentrated more upon informational skills than persuasive/argumentative skills. The negotiation analogue parallels an important part of economic life and directly involves argumentation skills. During the last ten years many Speech Communication scholars have become interested in the communication and argumentation demands of negotiating, examining such situations as school-board/teacher contract talks, labor/management disputes, and even hostage-taking incidents.

The negotiation analogue could be incorporated at forensic tournaments. Students could be given fact sheets describing a union demand and a management position and be assigned to negotiating teams. The judge could act as arbitrator.

Analogue Five: Legal Disputation

An analogue which demands even more direct argumentation skill may be borrowed from the courtroom. When concluding a case lawyers very often have a limited amount of time in which to prepare closing arguments. However, the closing argument is of

critical importance because it summarizes the case and leaves the salient points with the jury. In the forensics laboratory students and judges could be provided with edited trial transcripts which have the closing arguments deleted. Students could then have a half hour in which to prepare a ten minute closing arguement.

Conclusion

Competitive individual events is an inherently conservative activity. Despite the proliferation of events and participation in the activity, the contest situation has remained relatively static. Although the pedagogical worth of the activity has been challenged, little empirical research has been conducted in which the educational value has been measured. This paper has argued that conceptually, individual events need to analogize natural discourse situations. By so doing, students learn more about communication and argumentation. The skills are more directly transferable. In addition, the laboratory could become a place in which the researcher can validly derive and test theory. What we need now is for tournaments to incorporate more real world analogue events and for researchers to study the pedagogical worth of such practice.

Notes

[1]Jack Kay, "Rapprochement of World[1] and World[2]: Discovering the Ties Between Practical Discourse and Forensics," in Argument in Transition: Proceedings of the Third Summer Conference on Argumentation, eds. David Zarefsky, Malcolm O. Sillars, and Jack Rhodes (Annandale: SCA, 1983), 927-37.

[2]James H. McBath, ed., Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective (Skokie: National Textbook, 1975), 11.

[3]Michael D. Bartanen, "Are New Events Needed to Enhance a Laboratory Experience in Argumentation?" in Dimensions of Argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation (hereafter, Dimensions), eds. George Ziegelmueller and Jack Rhodes (Annandale: SCA, 1981), 405.

[4]David A. Thomas, "Sedalia Plus Five: Forensics as a Laboratory," in Proceedings of the Summer Conference on Argumentation (hereafter, Proceedings), eds. Jack Rhodes and Sara Newell (SCA/AFA, 1980), 246-48.

[5]David Zarefsky, "Argumentation and Forensics," in Proceedings, p. 22.

[6]Colan T. Hanson, "A Search for an Appropriate Argumentative Paradigm," in Dimensions, p. 302.

[7]George W. Ziegelmueller, cited in McBath, p. 18.

[8]G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Re-union of Argumentation and Debate Theory," in Dimensions, p. 428.

[9]Bartanen, p. 408.

[10]Suzanne Larson and Sean Patrick O'Rourke, "Predominant Forms of Argument in Individual Events," in Dimensions, p. 325.

[11]Don F. Faules, Richard D. Rieke, and Jack Rhodes, Directing Forensics: Contest and Debate Speaking (Denver: Morton, 1978) 1-31.

[12]Bartanen, p. 408; citing Henry McGucken, "Forensics in the Liberal Education," Western Speech, 34 (Spring 1970), 137.

[13]Larson and O'Rourke, p. 334.

[14]Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1969).